



Dietary Supplement Safety

Overview of Dietary Supplements

Many Sailors and Marines take dietary supplements in an effort to stay healthy and/or improve performance. Supplements are products that contain ingredients, such as vitamins, minerals, herbs, amino acids, enzymes, and metabolites, intended to complement the diet. However, research has only confirmed the health benefits of some dietary supplements; for example, vitamin D, folate, calcium, and other essential vitamins and minerals are beneficial. Others, such as those promoted for bodybuilding, weight loss, and performance enhancement, may be risky and potentially result in serious adverse effects. With the variety of dietary supplements available and so many claims made about their health benefits, it is difficult to know whether a supplement is safe or useful.

“It’s important to know that dietary supplements are many times unnecessary. Eating a balanced diet with a variety of food choices will provide what you are purchasing in dietary supplements naturally. Food is easier on your budget, provides energy, and minimizes or eliminates the potential for adverse health outcomes,” said Cmdr. Connie Scott, [Health Promotion and Wellness Department](#) Head.

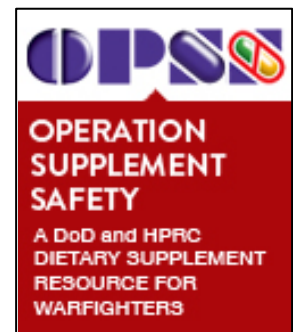
Congress categorizes dietary supplements as food instead of drugs, meaning that by law, manufacturers must ensure their products are safe before they are put on the market. Manufacturers are also responsible for determining that the claims on their labels are accurate and truthful. Sailors and Marines should be aware that the FDA’s role in the dietary supplement industry is limited to taking action against supplements that are found to be unsafe after they become available to consumers.

Operation Supplement Safety

Between the advertising claims, celebrity endorsements, and word of mouth, it is easy to understand the appeal of these enticing supplements. Be an informed consumer and look for reliable sources of information on dietary supplements to evaluate the product claims.

A great place to start is [Operation Supplement Safety](#), a program sponsored by the Human Performance Resource Center at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences to help service members and their families sort through the data on dietary supplements. The program cites the following as red flags to a potentially harmful supplement:

- Body building or weight loss products
- Sexual enhancement products
- Warnings such as “do not take if you have any medical condition or if you are taking any prescription medications”
- Warnings that the product may cause a positive result on a drug test
- Lack of a valid [third party certification](#) label such as the U.S. Pharmacopeial Convention (USP), National Science Foundation (NSF), Informed Choice, or Banned Substances Control Group (BSCG)



For more information on the do’s and don’ts of supplement use, please go to *Operation Supplement Safety*: <http://hprc-online.org/dietary-supplements/opss>.

Adverse effects with all dietary supplements should be reported to the FDA as soon as possible. For information on the reporting process, go to www.fda.gov/FDAgov/Food/DietarySupplements/Alerts/ucm111110.htm.

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